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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: poverty eradication

Statement submitted by Congregations of St. Joseph, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement

Poverty and lack of opportunities are the root causes of human trafficking

Context

Human trafficking is twenty-first-century slavery and it involves transporting, primarily women and children, within or across borders for sexual or labour exploitation. This includes forced work in prostitution, exotic dancing, domestic work, sweatshops, the agricultural sector and the construction and service industries. An estimated 800,000 people are trafficked across international borders each year.

Between 2002 and 2006, 1,331 trafficked persons were identified by the International Organization for Migration, of which half were trafficked for labour exploitation. Human trafficking is a violation of the human rights of hundreds of thousands of men, women and children around the globe.

The Chair of the Commission for Social Development at its forty-ninth session gave the following definition of poverty: "Extreme poverty is not simply a lack of adequate income ... individuals living in poverty experience multiple deprivations, restrictions in opportunities and social exclusion".

The General Assembly, in its resolution 64/293, recognized that poverty, unemployment, lack of socio-economic opportunities, gender-based violence, discrimination and marginalization are some of the contributing factors that make persons vulnerable to trafficking in persons.

Achieving the Millennium Development Goals, which aim to eradicate poverty, empower women and ensure access to education and health, would go a long way towards addressing the root causes of human trafficking.

Given the fact that poverty is a key contributing factor that makes people vulnerable to being trafficked, we point to the need for further work with regard to the definition of human trafficking contained in the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, by acknowledging the subtle forms of coercion that might be at play. This is an important factor in protecting the human rights of people who have been in situations of human trafficking. In particular, poverty should be specified as one of the "other forms of coercion" in the Protocol.

Trafficking in persons is more lucrative than trafficking in drugs because a person can be sold over and over. Sex trafficking is one of the most profitable industries of organized crime. Worldwide, human trafficking is a business that is worth $32 billion and that feeds on the demand for cheap labour. As such, it is closely linked to the excessive profit-seeking that is at the heart of the global financial and economic model.

Trafficking in women and children is both a human rights violation and a development issue. It has tremendous human, social and economic costs, contributing to the spread of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV. Trafficking in children deprives them of an education and the opportunity to achieve their full potential, robbing poor countries of their most vital resource for development: their people.

In our experience, in many countries the response to victims of human trafficking needs to be more human-centred. Recognition of the victim as a "victim" and the rights of the victim need to be central. This includes being culturally sensitive to victims, and being aware of language difficulties, of the need for trauma counselling, of the fact that victims may have little education and no awareness of their rights, and that they may be afraid of both traffickers and immigration officials. Victims find it difficult to access some services because of criminal justice systems. Safe, adequate and affordable housing is a problem for trafficked persons. Another concern is when women have to return to prostitution, a form of violence against women, to make ends meet because of a lack of education and options for decent work.

As Roger Plant, Head of the Special Action Programme to Combat Forced Labour of the International Labour Organization, said at the fifth conference on international perspectives on law enforcement cooperation in combating trafficking in human beings and trafficking for labour exploitation, "an ongoing debate among legislators and law enforcement officers is whether coercion is a necessary condition to make up the offence of human trafficking, or whether an employer who subjects workers to inhuman or degrading conditions, with earnings way below the legal minimum or the national average, can also be convicted of the offence".

The international community should scrutinize the broader situation concerning the demand for cheaper goods and services. That is, does the demand for cheaper goods lead to the exploitation of workers? An example of this is the child slavery that occurs in the cocoa and cotton industries.

Knowing the complexity of the human trafficking issue, we recognize the importance of collaboration between Government agencies and civil society. Non-governmental organizations with international structures and connections work at the grass-roots level and have a vital role to play in the areas of awareness-raising, advocacy and the provision of information to Governments on issues faced by the survivors of trafficking.

Recommendations

We encourage and call on Governments to continue working together internationally to find ways, collaboratively, in an effort to prevent and eradicate human trafficking.

We encourage Governments to institute laws addressing demand by criminalizing the purchase of sex. For example, in Sweden the purchasers of sex are prosecuted. This, in turn, has led to a decrease in human trafficking for sexual purposes.

We encourage Governments to promote educational programmes on gender issues and human trafficking as part of school curricula in countries of origin, transition and, especially, destination.

We urge Governments to implement policies that address the financial and environmental causes of mass migration.

We urge Governments to take seriously the following, which is contained in the United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons: the promotion and protection of human rights of victims of trafficking in persons, the

prevention of trafficking in persons by addressing the social, economic, cultural, political and other contributing factors and the strengthening of the criminal justice response are at the centre of all efforts to prevent and combat trafficking in persons and to protect, assist and provide redress to victims (General Assembly resolution 64/293, annex, para. 3).

We urge Governments to recognize the important roles that poverty, marginalization and the lack of socio-economic opportunities play in forcing persons into trafficked situations. For example, the "Delphi indicators" (four sets of operational indicators of human trafficking (involving adults and children for labour and sexual exploitation) resulting from a joint project of the European Commission and the International Labour Organization) demonstrate an understanding of how poverty can be coercive.

We encourage Governments to adopt a person-centred, not victim-centred, rights-based approach to the issue of human trafficking, which puts the emphasis on the protection of the rights of people who have been in situations of trafficking, and recommend that a human rights approach be taken in determining visa frameworks and the provision of support to survivors of trafficking. Such an approach should not be based on a criminal justice scheme or approach. This will also encourage trafficked persons to come forward and testify, and will ensure better success in the prosecution of traffickers.

We urge Governments to set in place a process for family reunification and settlement services so that families can be safely reunited and rehabilitated, and provided with financial and other holistic support.

Finally we urge Governments to provide good reintegration and rehabilitation programmes to ensure that survivors of trafficking are not trafficked again.

We realize that we are all one on this planet and therefore we encourage changing the social and economic structures that support the conditions that cause human trafficking.

Note: The statement is endorsed by the following non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Council: Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, Dominican Leadership Conference, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd and Passionists International.